

## **VAZELON (ST. JOHN) MONASTERY OF MAÇKA TREBIZOND**

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### ***Rezumat: Mănăstirea Vazelon – Sf. Ioan din Maçka Trebizond***

Fascinație și punct de reper spiritual, aceștia sunt termenii care descriu modul în care Bizanțul în general și, în special, Trapezuntul au fost percepuți în istoria bătrânului continent.

*Împărații de Trapezunt au știut să păstreze măreția, luxul, pompa de la curte, arătând capacitatea lor de a crea un mod de viață aparte. Prin abilitățile lor diplomatice și dragostea lor pentru ortodoxie, împărații bizantini au atras atenția vecinilor imperiului.*

*Există trei mănăstiri într-o zonă relativ restrânsă ca suprafață în zona Trapezunt - Turcia: Sumela, Hagia Sophia și Vazelon. În acest studiu ne-am oprit asupra uneia dintre aceste mănăstiri, mică dar foarte importantă.*

**Abstract:** Fascination, spiritual landmark and seduction: these are the terms that describe how Byzantium was perceived in general, and mainly Trabzon, in the history of the old continent.

The Trabzon' sovereigns displayed in a brilliant manner the features that characterized the Byzantine Empire. They knew to preserve the greatness, the luxury, the pump at the court that showed their capacity to create a unique standard of living. Through their diplomatic ability and love for the Orthodoxy, the Byzantine emperors tried to draw the neighbours' attention to Trabzon and its surroundings.

There are three monasteries in a relatively small area near Trabzon city of Turkey: Sumela, Hagia Sophia and Vazelon. At this paper we worked on one of them, the smallest but the strongest once upon a time, that was called Vazelon Monastery.

### ***Résumé: Le monastere Vazelon – St. Jean du Maçka Trebizond***

Fascination, point de repère spirituel et de la séduction : ce sont les termes qui décrivent comment Byzance a été perçue en général, et principalement Trabzon, dans l'histoire du vieux continent.

La souverains Trabzon s'affiche de manière brillante les caractéristiques qui ont marqué l'Empire byzantin. Ils ont su préserver la grandeur, le luxe, la pompe à la cour qui a montré leur capacité à créer une norme unique de la vie. Grâce à leur capacité diplomatique et de l'amour pour l'orthodoxie, les empereurs byzantins ont essayé d'attirer l'attention des voisins à Trabzon et ses environs.

Il y a trois monastères dans une zone relativement petite ville près de Trabzon en Turquie – Sumela, Hagia Sophia et Vazelon. À ce papier, nous avons travaillé sur l'un d'eux, le plus petit mais le plus fort était une fois, qui a été appelé Monastère Vazelon.

**Keywords:** Vazelon Monastery, Maçka, monks, frescoes, Silkroad

### Introduction

Trabzon is one of the most beautiful towns in the Near East and it was the capital of the Byzantine Empire for two and a half centuries. It is situated above the Black Sea – as it is mentioned in the documents – and it is an opulent area in consequence of the trade made with the interior of Asia. The same merchantry made it famous. Fascination, spiritual landmark and seduction: these are the terms that describe how Byzantium was perceived in general, and mainly Trabzon, in the history of the old continent. But this fascination was also given by the ecclesiastical monuments of the region. Among these monuments, the Vazelon Monastery has a special place, both from the point of view of its age and its rich history, and from the historical and theological messages of the frescoes that can still be seen. In the present study, we want to draw the attention upon some details regarding one chapel of this monastery, St. Elias, that preserves some fragments of frescoes, which are very important for the XI th –XII th centuries Byzantine iconography. In a forth coming study we will approach the cultural role played by the Vazelon Monastery in the history of the Byzantine Empire of Trabzon.

Through their diplomatic ability and through their love for Orthodoxy, theemperors knew to attract the attention of the neighbouring peoples, making themgravitate around Trabzon.

Trabzon on the historic Silk Road, is an important province of Turkey's Eastern Black Sea Region. This beautiful city is also at the cross road of trade between east and west. Historic records reveal that the city was dominated by the Miletians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines.

The monasteries, tombs, churches, museums, tombs, city walls surrounding Trabzon and the examples of civil architecture form the historic texture of the city.

Visited by many local and foreign travellers, this mysterious city of the east has won high praise throughout history.

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Though not having a certain date of foundation, Vazelon Monastery, which is located in Kiremitli residence, 14 km's to Maça District of Trabzon City, it is thought to have been built between 270-317s. It is narrated that Justinianus restored the monastery in 565. But we do not have any written source giving information regarding this era. In 644-702, the monastery underwent a good many repairs and restorations. The parts that still stand today dated to 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The monastery which continued its missions until the 20<sup>th</sup> century was deserted in 1923. Vazelon Monastery faced same fate of Sumela at the end of 1922 which on January 30, Population Exchange Agreement signed between Turkey and Greece. According to this Agreement, all Muslims domiciled in Greece and all Orthodox Christians under Phanar Patriarchate living in Turkey except Western Thrace and Istanbul would be exchanged. The exchange proposal had been put forward by League of Nations' High Commissioner for Immigrants Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, Greek PM Elefterios Venizelos and British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon.<sup>1</sup> This Agreement came into force at the very beginning of May, 1923 and together with Christian population of the region the monks of the Vazelon Monastery like the monks of Soumela left the building.

Differing from Sumela Monastery, limestone was not used in the building, the front façade is about 40 meters. The Monastery has been built in front of a huge granite rock block and wall stones had been cut from this rock. Due to this reason, the front part of the Monastery is not as shiny as Sumela. The place of the Monastery was an opening gate of trade routes once upon a time. About 200 south of the monastery there is a small tribute stream flowing into Degirmendere River. The Valley Vazelon Monastery built was a wealthy and fertile area<sup>2</sup>, there were grape vines and rich villages around.

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<sup>1</sup> Lozan Barış Konferansı, Tutanaklar-Belgeler [Lausanne Peace Conference. Minutes-Documents], translated by Seha L. Meray, V. I, 3. Ed., İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001. p. 118-19, 125; Levon Marashlian, *The Armenian Question from Sérvés to Lausanne, Economics and Morality in American and British Policies 1920-1923*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992. p. 690; LCMD, *The Papers of Mark L. Bristol-V, War Diary*, May 30, 1923. p. 2; New York Times, "Turks Wants to Stay Greeks to Return", February 8, 1923. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Trabzon Vilayeti Salnamesi 1901* [Trabzon Province's Year Book], V. 19, Ed. Kudret Emiroğlu, Trabzon İli ve İlçeleri Eğitim, Kültür ve Sosyal Yardımlaşma Vakfı, Ankara,

Various sources indicate that the monastery was devoted to prophet Jashua. It is told that Vazelon Monastery was built before Sumela despite it is the smallest one of the three monasteries of region (three monasteries in the region are; Vazelon, Sumela and Kuştu Monasteries) but during the historical process Sumela became *prima inter pares* of these three Monasteries in the region.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact, Ottoman Tax Books and Annuals give some information about the Monastery of Sumela but they do not give any information regarding Vazelon Monastery. The ground floor's entrance, the windows and the doors of the monastery, which have an entrance in the west, are closed. As one climbs the stairs, she/he can see three rooms in each narrow corridor. There is a huge dining hall, kitchen and a large refectory. Next to these are three Byzantine basilicas and a vaulted cistern. In the ground floor of the monastery there are stairs marching up into a small hall. There are six rooms located in two sides of corridors. At the top of the Monastery there is church built in front of a cave. On old engravings of the Monastery it is possible to see the said bell tower of this church. Today the bell tower had gone down. There are Heaven, Dormition, Last Judgment Day and Hell paintings to the western wall of the church. There is another church chapel at the entrance of Monastery to the northern side of the building. The paintings of this chapel are mostly indistinguishable though the style of upper church and this chapel are different. The paintings of upper Church are older than the paintings of northern chapel at the entrance. When looked at the plan, it is clear that the Monastery has not been built in a definite period. The construction and enlargement process went on from the beginning until 1923. At the front, to the south of balconies there are cut stone stairs providing access into the Monastery. Similar to the Monastery of Soumela until late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries there were a hanging wooden ladder that was taken up at nights at the entrance. Like Sumela, cut stone steps have been built during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the entrance, there was a long and narrow corridor and chambers had been situated at the both side of this corridor.

The area is so steep that, it is almost impossible to climb up to the church because accessing ladders had fallen down. The Monastery consists of four floors, the fourth one has a façade at the front, similar to the northern side of Soumela Monastery. The style of the façade and the balconies at the front side are similar to the monastery of Sumela. Both built after 19<sup>th</sup> century. The basic

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2008. p. 397, 399; İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, Maçka, Pencere Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004. p.46-47.

<sup>3</sup> İsmail Köse, *The Monastery Hidden Above the Clouds-Soumela*, Akademi Kitabevi, Trabzon, 2010. p. 113.

difference between Sumela and Vazelon Monasteries' front, eastern side is the usage of stone. In Sumela the front side had been built by limestone though in Vazelon with cut granite stone. The rocks had been cut from the huge rock block where the Monastery built in front of. At the vicinity of Sumela and Vazelon Monasteries there is not any limestone quarry these inefficiency forced the founders to use ordinary stone yet in Sumela Limestone were carried by mules from Santa High Plateaus 12 km's to the Monastery.<sup>4</sup>

The first church of the monastery as it was told before had been built next to fourth floor at the rear where there is a small cave. It is narrated that, despite its appearance and easy accessibility when compared to Kustul and Sumela Monasteries, Vazelon was the strongest monastery of Maçka region and it was controlling all revenues and lands at the vicinity. Another specialty of the Monastery was its location on the Historical Silk Road. This feature had enriched and empowered the building but when the historical Silk Road started to collapse by the beginning to the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vazelon Monastery also gradually lost its traditional importance and richness. At present, Vazelon Monastery and her vicinity are a deserted area, the nearest settlement about 3 km's distance. From Trabzon city centre to the Monastery an average drive takes about one and half hour. The last 4 km's of the road is unpaved and requires careful drive. The visitor needs to walk about 15 minutes to arrive to Monastery. There are horn beam, pine trees and rhododendrons, wild hazelnuts both side of the path. To the right side of the monastery, there is a small chapel, built in later centuries. The frescoes of the chapel had been mostly destroyed.

However, a small chapel (5, 3 m length x 3,6 m width x 4,5m height) stands on the monastery terrace, about 30 m north of the central building. Chrysanthos<sup>5</sup> identified the chapel, which Talbot Rice saw in 1929, with Topalides<sup>6</sup> chapel of St. Elias (the Prophet Elijah. A place called St. Elias appears in Vazelon Acts<sup>7</sup> of the thirteenth century - 1292. Another possible dedication is provided by what may be the earliest graffito in the chapel, scratched on the red border above the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Chrysanthos Philippides, Metropolitan of Trebizond, *Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζοῦντος* [The Church of Trebizond], in „Αρχαίου Πόντου”1933, p. 485.

<sup>6</sup> Topalides, P. *Ιστορία τῆς ἱεράς βασιλικῆς πατριαρχικῆς καί σταυροπηγιακῆς μονῆς τοῦ Τιμίου Προδρόμου καί Βαπτίστου Ἰωάννου Ζαβουλονή ἢ Βαζελῶν* [History of the patriarchal church of the monastery St. John the Baptist of Vazelon], Trebizond, 1909, p. 84, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Uspenskij. F. I., Benešević, V. V., *Actes de Vazélon: matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de la propriété rurale et monastique à Byzance aux XIII-XVe siècles*, Leningrad, 1927, Acts 104, 115.

head of St. Nicholas. Stylistically, St. Elias has some affinities with the Hagia Sophia, Trebizond.<sup>8</sup>

But we are inclined to believe that this casual pilgrim graffito, which cannot be taken to be a formal dedication inscription, refers to the imperial refoundation of the church of the Prodomos in the monastery itself, while, insofar as there is a prominently placed figure in the iconography of the chapel, it is St. Elias and we are inclined to concur with Chrysanthos that this chapel (as well as the Skete above the monastery) was dedicated to the Prophet.

*Architecture.* A small barrel-vaulted chapel, with single projecting apse, semicircular on both the exterior and the interior, typical for this region. The apse has a window with three small lights; another small window is in the south wall. The single door, in the west wall, has a tympanum above the lintel. Except for its ashlar quoins, door, and window frames, the chapel is built of fairly large blocks in irregular courses. Little mortar is exposed; there are no signs of pulverized brick in it. The exterior was at one time whitewashed, but there is no indication that it was otherwise decorated. The only exceptional feature is a round hole about 25 cm in diameter which was intentionally cut in the north side of the vault and may originally have been covered by tiles. More recently, a hole has been broken in the south vault to serve as a chimney for fires. This has revealed the structure of the vault and roof. The vault is of mortared rubble, the roof is of large thin stone tiles at the eaves, overlaid by smaller narrower stones at the top (as at Sachnoe), the whole supported by a rib at the centre.

*Decoration.* The interior is entirely covered by a single layer of painting. The decoration is well preserved, apart from portions in the top and centre of the conch, most of the faces of the figures (which have been mutilated), and an area round the hole in the roof (which has been blackened with soot

The painting is on two layers of plaster. A lower lime-and straw plaster ground is of varying thickness, according to the surface of the masonry, but averages 2 cm. It is slightly yellow in colour, with abundant straw in quite large pieces. Plaster joins ran along vertical and horizontal red borders. A thin surface layer of plaster carries the painting. Basic colours are yellow, brown, green, brick red, black, white, haematite purple, blue, and (perhaps) olive green. The ground colours of backgrounds are yellow or brick red. Flesh is built up on a green ground. Halos have a broad haematite inner outline and a white outer outline, compass drawn, perhaps with a reed rather than a brush. The same device was used for St George's circular shield. Green garments have a green ground, dark green shadow lines, light green intermediate highlights and white highlights. Red

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<sup>8</sup> *L'art byzantin du XIII –e siècle. Symposium de Sopoćani*, Belgrad 1965.

garments a red ground, dark red shadow lines and white highlights. In the painted inscriptions, aspirates are angled hooks. "Alphas" sometimes have a diagonal bar and "deltas" stepped bar and pronounced serifs. The lettering is close to that found in St. John Theologos, Dikaisimon, assigned by Protassoff<sup>9</sup> to the thirteenth century. An old description of this chapel remark a lot of scenes and figures.

Iconographically, the group of ascetic saints is appropriate to a monastery such as Vazon and is paralleled for example in St. Sabbas, Trebizond. The group of military saints, led by St. Eugenios of Trebizond, whose official cult the Grand Komnenoi were at pains to promote, may be compared with a similar concern with military saints in the fourteenth-century Serbia. The painter of St. Elias had a feeling for scale and monumentality. The painter of St. Elias had a feeling for scale and monumentality.<sup>10</sup> About fifty votive and other inscriptions are scratched on the wall paintings. Their style ranges from the careful, stilted open lettering of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries through that with convoluted ligatures.<sup>11</sup> The best preserved are the following scenes:

**West wall:**

First register:

- **Sts. Constantine and Helena**, in lower register of west wall, north of door. Like that in the eastern chapel of St. Sabbas, and unlike that in Sarmaşikli Upper Church<sup>12</sup>, the Vazon composition shows Constantine on the left and Helena on the right. They are inscribed respectively *ὁ ἀγιος Κωνσταντινος* and *ἡ ἄγια Ἐλένη*. Their cross bears four capital *epsilons*. The jewelled robes of the Vazon example are fussier in detail than those in the St. Sabbas chapel of 1411, but the composition is substantially more confident-looking than that in Sarmaşikli. Helena's imperial robe has a red ground, dark red shadow lines,

<sup>9</sup> N. Protassoff, *Monuments de Dževizlyk*, in „Byzantion” IV, 1927 – 1928, pp. 418 - 425

<sup>10</sup> Talbot Rice, D. *Notice on some religious buildings in the city and vilayet of Trebizond*, in “Byzantion”, 5, 1930, p. 79-81.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Sarmaşikli Geyikli Kilisesi it is about 1,5 km north of Maça. There are three medieval churches in the area: Sarmaşikli, Upper Church, Sarmaşikli Middle Chapel, and Sarmaşikli Lower Chapel, the betoken at least a medieval settlement, topographically pointing to Zouza, Kapuköy, a thirteenth century primary *chorion* of Vazon which was confirmed in 1386. Uspenskij. F. I., Benešević, V. V., *Actes de Vazelon : matériaux...* Act 79, 103. A. Bryer and D. Winfield *Nineteenth - century monuments in the city and vilayet of Trebizond: architectural and historical notes*, in “Αργεϊον Πόντου” 30, (1970) p. 259.

and white highlights; the artist has treated the kite shaped end of her *loros* convincingly, as if he knew how the garment was actually worn.

- **St. Makarios**, to the right, in lower register of west wall, is inscribed *ἀχ(ιος) Μακαριος* the head of this strikingly tall, hirsute, naked figure, has been obliterated. His right hand clutches a long wispy beard; his left is raised open. St. Makarios, pneumatophore of the *Skete*, is depicted as a conventional ascetic.

Second register:

- **Baptism**<sup>13</sup>, in middle register of west wall, south portion. The scene is inscribed, *Ἡ Βαπτίσις* and Christ is identified with the symbols IC XC. The Prodromos places his right hand on the head of Christ; a dove descends from above; a sketchy grisaille personification of the Jordan with an urn crouches below Christ and the Prodromos; to the right stand three angels with yellow, green, and yellow halos.

- **Raising of Lazarus**<sup>14</sup>, in middle register of west wall, north portion; The scene is inscribed *Ἡ ἐγερσις τοῦ Λαζάρου*; to the right of Christ are the symbols IC XC. Four apostles follow him, but the arch above the door precludes the inclusion of Martha and Mary. One figure unwraps the cloth wound around Lazarus, another removes the marbled lid of his sarcophagus; the artist's treatment of six mourning Jews behind Lazarus is of some distinction.

Last register:

- **Koimesis of the Theotokos**<sup>15</sup>, in upper register of west wall. St. Peter in (possibly) green chiton and yellow himation; St. Paul in purple chiton and grey himation.

<sup>13</sup> The iconography of the Baptism of Christ was fairly stable for about a thousand years, and even after that artists still stayed with more or less the same arrangement of figures. On the left we see a 6th-century image from Palestine with all the features that will be repeated in countless versions. Jesus stands naked in the River Jordan while John the Baptist extends his hand to pour water from a cup over his head. Angels stand on the opposite bank with clothing for him. Observers stand behind the Baptist. Above Jesus we see a dove and above that a representation of the Father, in this case a hand pointing to Jesus.

<sup>14</sup> The *Raising of Lazarus* or the *Ressurrection Of Lazarus* is a miracle of Jesus, in which Jesus brings Lazarus back to life four days after his burial. John Clowes, *The Miracles of Jesus Christ* published by J. Gleave, Manchester, UK, 1817 page 274.

<sup>15</sup> Κοίμησις Θεοτόκου is a Great Feast of the Ortodox Church and Catholic Churches which commemorates the "falling asleep" or death of Mary, the mother of Jesus (literally translated as *God-bearer*), and her bodily resurrection before being taken up into heaven. It is celebrated on August 15 as the *Feast of the Dormition* of the Mother of God. In Orthodoxy and Catholicism, in the language of the scripture, death is often

**South wall:**

First register:

- **St. Euthymios**<sup>16</sup>, in lower register of south wall, is inscribed but damaged. A companion of St. Sabbas, St. Euthymios is also found in the paintings of 1443 in the tower of the Hagia Sophia, Trebizond.<sup>17</sup>

- **St. Arsenios**, in lower register of south wall, is inscribed but damaged. St. Arsenios the Roman, fourth-century anchorite disciple of St. John the Small, is otherwise unrepresented in Pontic painting

- **Prophet Elijah (Elias)** in lower register is indistinct, save for his name

- **St. Gregory (of Nyssa)**<sup>18</sup> in lower register of apse wall, is identified simply as *ὁ ἀχ(ιος) Γριγόρηος*. His white sticharion has greenish folds. The five lines of his scroll are taken from the opening of the first antiphon: *Κύριε ὁ Θεός ἡ μῶν οὐ τό Κράτος ἀνείκατν καί ἡ δόξα*.

Second register:

- **Nativity and Presentation**, in upper register of south wall, west section. The two scenes, which are not separated by a red border, were so badly encrusted with soot that only when the surface was washed for photography purposes was it realized that they were actually two separate scenes. Despite the small scale of the work, all essential elements (including Joseph, the Magi, and the Bath of the Child, a single shepherd, and an angel) are included in the Nativity. Christ is identified with the symbols IC XC. The Presentation is inscribed *Ἡ Ὑπαπαντή*. Simeon bears the Christ Child beneath a canopy; the Theotokos holds out her veiled hands; Joseph carries two doves, and behind him

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called a "sleeping" or "falling asleep" (Greek *κοίμησις*; whence *κοιμητήριον* -> *coemetērium* -> *cemetery*, a place of sleeping).

<sup>16</sup> Saint Euthymius the Great (377 – 20 January 473) was an abbot in Palestine venerated in both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Because of his ascetic life and firm confession of the Orthodox Faith, St Euthymius is called "the Great." Wearied by contact with the world, the holy abba went for a time into the inner desert. After his return to the lavra some of the brethren saw that when he celebrated the Divine Liturgy, fire descended from Heaven and encircled the saint. St Euthymius himself revealed to several of the monks that often he saw an angel celebrating the Holy Liturgy with him. The saint had the gift of clairvoyance, and he could discern a person's thoughts and spiritual state from his outward appearance. When the monks received the Holy Mysteries, the saint knew who approached worthily, and who received unworthily.

<sup>17</sup> D. Talbot Rice *The church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond*, Edinburg 1968, p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, also known as Gregory Nyssen c. 335 – 395, was bishop of Nyssa from 372 to 376 and from 378 until his death. He is venerated as a saint in Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism. Gregory, his brother Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nazianzus are collectively known as the Cappadocian Father.

is a figure which is presumably the prophetess Anna.

- **Annunciation**, in upper register of south wall, east section .The spirited angel of the Annunciation is divided from the Theotokos (who stands before an abbreviated architectural background) by the south window.

**North wall:**

First register – military saints:

- **St. Demetrios**<sup>19</sup> begins a series of four standing military saints, which follow each other without any separation.

- **St. Theodore** has nothing to indicate which of the two saints bearing the same name is represented here

- **St. Eugenios of Trebizond**<sup>20</sup>, in lower register of north wall. Despite damage to the face, this is perhaps the finest surviving wall painting of the patron of Trebizond. The figure is inscribed *ὁ ἀγ(ιος) Εὐγένιος ὁ Τραπεζοῦντ* . He holds a long white martyr's cross and wears a short red military tunic and blue

<sup>19</sup> Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki - greek: *Ἅγιος Δημήτριος της Θεσσαλονίκης*) was a Christian martyr, who lived in the early 4th century. St. Demetrius was initially depicted in icons and mosaics as a young man in patterned robes with the distinctive *tablion* of the senatorial class across his chest. Miraculous military interventions were attributed to him during several attacks on Thessaloniki, and he gradually became thought of as a soldier: a Constantinopolitan ivory of the late 10th century shows him as an infantry soldier (Metropolitan Museum of Art). But an icon of the late 11th century in Sinai shows him as before, still a civilian. This may be due to iconic depiction customs on how saints are depicted. Eugenia Russell, *St Demetrius of Thessalonica; Cult and Devotion in the Middle Ages*, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2010; ames C. Skedros, *Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki: Civic Patron and Divine Protector 4th-7th Centuries CE*, Trinity Press International, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Saint Eugeni or Eugene was martyred in the time of Diocletian (i.e. 284-305) and a cult devoted to him developed in Trebizond. His feast day is 21 January. Eugene along with the martyrs Saint Candidus, Valerian and Aquila was persecuted during the reign of Diocletian and Maximian (305-311). The four hid in the mountains above Trebizond, but were eventually found and brought before the regimental commander Lycius. They were flogged, tortured with fire and eventually beheaded. Eugenios is credited with the destruction of the image on the "gray hill" overlooking the city, later known as t the Mithratis. The Komnenian rulers of the Empire of trebizond adopted the saint as the patron of their country. His miracles include assisting Trebizond to repel the attacks of the Seljuk Turcs in 1224. His image appears frequently on Trapezuntine coins. The cult and pilgrimage around this saint never really developed beyond Trebizond's borders, although John Lazaropoulos, Metropolitan of Trebizond in the name Joseph, collected the miracles of St. Eugenios into one book in the 14th century. See J.O. Rosenquist, *The hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond*, in „Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia”, 5, Uppsala, 1996.

cloak edged with pearls. His kite-shaped shield is white, decorated with a pattern which might be described as *disintegrated Kufic* lettering in red.

- **St. George** is inscribed *ὁ ἀχ(ιος) Γεώργιος*. His red cloak is fastened over a convincing representation of chain mail. But the most striking feature of the figure is its brightly painted circular shield. Unlike St. Demetrios, St. George is relatively common in Pontic painting, and the Grand Komnenos George even substituted him for St. Eugenios on certain bronze coin types.

Next images of saints cannot be deciphered.

Second register:

- **Crucifixion**, in upper register of north wall west section, left. The scene is inscribed *Ἡ Σταύρωσις*. At the head of the cross is the label *Ὁ βασιλεύς τῆς δόξης* between the sigla IC XC. The Theotokos is identified as the *MHP ΘV* and St John as *Ὁ αγ(ιος) Ἰω(άννης) Ὁ Θεολόγος*. St. John wears a red chiton and a green himation, and Christ's loincloth is also green. These green garments are built up from a green ground and dark green shadow lines, to light green intermediate highlights, and white highlights. Christ has a red halo. The skull of Golgotha lies below the cross. Two plunging angels flank the top of the cross. The sun and moon are omitted. The twisted, etiolated figure of Christ is relatively, and unusually, smaller than those of St. John and the Theotokos.

- **Anastasis**, in upper register of north wall, west section, right, follows the Crucifixion without a red dividing border. The scene is named *Ἡ Ανάστασις* and Christ bears the sigla IC XC. The two Just Kings stand to the left in front of the Prodomos, who points to Christ. Christ has no mandorla and moves to the right without glancing back. The Gates of Hell lie apart, not across each other. Christ grasps the cross with his left hand and Adam's wrist with his right. Behind Adam is Eve, and behind her Abel awaits his turn. Pontic artists were usually unsure of the appearance of classical or Early Christian sarcophagi. Here the artist has given up the attempt altogether and has depicted tower-like structures, complete with windows, from which the figures emerge. Christ wears a green chiton and a yellow himation on which the highlighting is particularly neatly hatched. The Gates of Hell are yellow and the mouth of Hell itself is haematite purple. The heavily jewelled kings wear red and green tunics and green and red superhumeral, respectively. St. John Prodomos is covered with a brown hairy cloak. Christ's hair is brown and his halo red with a jewelled cross. Adam's hair is grey, long, and his halo is green. The kings' and the Prodomos' halos are yellow; Eve and Abel have no halos. The "*sarcophagi*" are pink and the rocks in the background brownish.

- **Transfiguration** – the apostles who are visible one wears a red chiton and a yellow himation, and another a green himation.

**Altar:**

Register hierarch:

- **St. Athanasios** - is the first of six standing Father of the Church who are turned toward the centre of the apse, tree on either side in respect to the centre. Is identified as *Ο άγ(ιος) Αθανάσιος*

- **St. Gregory (of Nazianzus)**, in lower register of apse wall, is named *Ο άχιος Γριχόρηος*. The five lines of his scroll begin (but perhaps do not end) with the opening of the prayer of the second antiphon: *ό τάς κοι νάς ταύ τας και συμφώνος τς αιτα τάς αιτήσεις*. Graffiti of two bearded heads on the background to the right of St. Gregory's name should be noted in plate<sup>21</sup>.

- **St. Basil**, in lower register of apse wall, is identified by only four letters of his name. His scroll is destroyed and his face, like those of all the other Fathers, has been defaced.

- **St. John Chrysostom** - the first of the group of three Fathers turned to the left.

- **St. Gregory (of Nyssa)** in lower register of apse wall, is identified simply as *ό άχ(ιος) Γριγόρηος*. His white sticharion has greenish folds. The five lines of his scroll are taken from the opening of the first antiphon: *Κ ύριε ό Θεός η μών ού τό Κράτος άνείκατν και ή δόξα .*

- **St. Nicholas**, in lower register of apse wall, is identified as *ό άχ(ιος) Νικόλαος* (an attempt has been made to prise out his name). His white sticharion has pinkish folds. The four lines of his scroll are badly damaged but appear to be taken from the opening of the ekphonesis of the second prayer of the faithful: *ό πως ύ πο του κράτους πάντοτε.*

**Chapel vault:**

- **Ascension** - in east vault Christ in red chiton and purple himation; four winged angels; other figures probably apostles

- **Pentecost** - 0 in badly damaged west vault. Apostle is in green chiton and red himation. The monastery was endowed by several emperors, particularly by the Grand Komnenos Alexios III (1349 - 1390)<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western I* Oxford 1896, p. 311 apud Anthony Bryer, David Winfield, *The Byzantine monuments and topography of the PONTOS*, Washington D.C. 1985, p.291.

<sup>22</sup> William Miller, *Trebizond: The last Greek Empire of the Byzantine Era: 1204-1461*, 1926 (Chicago: Argonaut, 1969), p. 46; Finlay,G. *The History of Greece and the Empire of Trebizond, (1204-1461)* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1851), p. 386.

Records of the region had been kept in the Vazelon Monastery for a long period. These records have been taken and brought to Russia during Russian occupation of Trabzon (1916-1917) and are in Sankt Petersburg Museum at present. Vazelon Acts and Baptism Records have vital information regarding demographic structure of Late Byzantine Period and Early Comnenus Kingdom of Trabzon. Rustam Shukurov, who worked on Vazelon Acts<sup>23</sup> and Baptism Records say that;

“The number of unidentified names in all available sources adds up more than 40 percent of the total number of nicknames and family names. This corresponds in general to the figures of A. Bryer who estimated standard Greek names of the Acts of Vazelon only to be 47.3 percent. The remaining 52.7 percent are unidentified names and those of their beginning, the major part of which is likely of non-Greek origin”.<sup>24</sup>

This fact proves that, many of Turkish tribes who arrived to the administrative area of Vazelon Monastery had been Christianized during the Late Byzantine Period and Comnenus Kingdom. Vazelon Monastery in this point of view plays a crucial role on mirroring past events. Last monk, Dionysios Amarantidis, saved the icon of Saint John Prodromou, which he subsequently transported and guarded at the monastery of Agia Triada, located in Serres, Greece.

Therefore, the city has gained a rich cultural heritage, enriched by many ancient tales. We welcome everyone among us who amidst the historical and cultural values and unparalleled natural beauty of Trabzon,

### Conclusions

The Trabzon' sovereigns displayed in a brilliant manner the features that characterized the Byzantine Empire. They knew to preserve the greatness, the luxury, the pomp at the court that showed their capacity to create a unique

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<sup>23</sup> See, Ф. Успенский, В. Бенешевич, *Вазелонские акты. Материал для истории крестьянского и монастырского землевладения в Византии XIII-XV вв.* [The Acts of Vazelon: Materials for the history of rural and monastic property in the 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> centuries Byzantium], Ленинград, 1927; Also see, F. Dölger, *Zur den Urkunden des Vazelonklosters bei Trapezunt*, in “Byzantinische Zeitschrift”, (1929/30) 29, p. 329-344.

<sup>24</sup> Rustem Shukurov, *Turkish-Speaking Byzantines of the Pontus*, in “Trabzon Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri 6-8 Kasım 1998”, Trabzon, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Trabzon Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları: 81, Trabzon, 2000. p. 100.

standard of living. Through their diplomatic ability and love for the Orthodoxy, the Byzantine emperors tried to draw the neighbors' attention to Trabzon and its surroundings. In addition, their interest in maintaining the permanence of monasteries of that area led them, and especially Alexios III Megas Komnenos, to endow the Vazelon Monastery. After the Turkish conquest of Trabzon Empire, in 1461, the Vazelon Monastery persisted for many centuries. Nevertheless, during the the First World War, it was abandoned and destroyed by the treasure hunters. Today, the specialists in the history of Byzantium art could find a valuable information about the beauty and the greatness of the Byzantium iconography, and about what was once the Byzantium Empire of Trabzon, an empire of the Christian spirituality.